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Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Dissemination of information on decolonization during the period from June 2004 to March 2005

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in paragraph 2 of its resolution 59/135 of 10 December 2004, considered that it was important to continue its efforts to ensure the widest possible dissemination of information on decolonization and, in paragraph 3, requested the Department of Public Information to take measures through all media available, including publications, radio, television, and the Internet, to publicize the work of the United Nations in the field of decolonization. The present report, prepared in response to that mandate, covers the activities undertaken by the Department in the field of decolonization during the reporting period from June 2004 to March 2005.

2. The activities of the Department pertaining to decolonization continued to focus on coverage of the work of the General Assembly and the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, building partnerships with civil society through the network of United Nations information centres and strengthening the use of the Internet for the widest possible dissemination of information.

II. Coverage of issues before the General Assembly

3. The Department continued to publicize the work of the United Nations in the field of decolonization, with the issuance of 37 press releases, in English and French, on the relevant meetings of the General Assembly, the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) and the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of

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Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. All press releases were also posted on the United Nations website, where they are available to a global audience.

4. Over the past year, the Public Inquiries Unit of the Department of Public Information responded to some 30 queries from the public concerning decolonization. Most inquiries were referred to online documentation and, in certain cases, were sent background papers.

5. The topic of decolonization was regularly included in the Department's guided tour of United Nations Headquarters and was included in the training of new guides and in the guides' daily briefings, as relevant.

III. United Nations Radio and Television

6. The Radio Section of the Department of Public Information continued to cover decolonization and related issues in its daily news programmes and current affairs magazines, in both official and non-official languages, for regional and worldwide dissemination.

7. Issues covered included: the request of the Decolonization Committee to the United States of America to return Vieques to Puerto Rican people; the Falkland Islands; the request of the Decolonization Committee to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Argentina to recommence negotiations; the statement by the Secretary-General that colonialism is an anachronism of the twenty-first century; the emphasis put by Caribbean States on the need for the remaining non-self-governing territories to attain self-determination; the participation of the Caribbean and Latin American States in the celebration of 10 years of freedom in South Africa; a regional seminar on decolonization which opened with a call for cooperation in achieving self-determination; the statement by a representative of the United States Virgin Islands that the need for political education remains critical in informing people of their right to self-determination; and the urging by Grenada that the United Kingdom and Argentina allow the people of the Falkland Islands to determine their own destiny.

8. Additional topics covered by United Nations radio included: the request by the Cayman Islands that the United Nations inform the people of the islands of their options with regard to self-determination; the report to the Decolonization Committee that there is a need for greater support for political education in the dependent territories; the stress given by Dominica to its position that decolonization continues to be an important objective; the warning by Dominica that racism and lack of self-determination continue to serve as major causes of conflict in many parts of the world; the statement by Saint Lucia that its focus remains on the non-self-governing territories in the region; and the statement by Saint Kitts and Nevis that good governance requires respect for the right of nations to choose their own direction.

9. The Arabic Radio Unit has regularly covered issues concerning Western Sahara. The Department of Public Information reports on the issue every time it is discussed in the Security Council, both through radio news and daily features.

IV. Publications

10. Coverage of the Fourth Committee, in particular the question of Western Sahara, and resolutions on decolonization adopted by the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session are included in the *UN Chronicle*, issue No. 1, 2005.

11. United Nations activities regarding decolonization during the period from June 2004 to March 2005 will be reported on in both the fifty-eighth and fifty-ninth volumes of the *Yearbook of the United Nations*. The fifty-eighth volume will include the full text of resolution 59/135 and coverage of the Secretary-General's report (A/AC.109/2004/18). The fifty-seventh (2003) volume of the *Yearbook* will be completed by 31 May 2005.

V. Internet

12. A wide array of developments and issues related to decolonization continued to be covered regularly on the United Nations News Centre, one of the most frequently visited pages on the United Nations website. Stories related to decolonization were also distributed through the English and French language e-mail news service to over 36,000 subscribers worldwide, and were picked up by a growing number of external websites, including those of media outlets and non-governmental organizations.

VI. United Nations information services in Geneva and Vienna

13. During the period under review, staff of the United Nations information service in Vienna drew attention to the successful work of the United Nations in the field of decolonization, highlighting recent achievements in Timor-Leste. This was done through its public relations activities (for example, an open house day event in October 2004, which drew 15,000 visitors to the United Nations Office at Vienna) in the form of the regular guided tours for visitors to the United Nations Office at Vienna, as well as through lectures and briefings. That topic was also discussed by information service staff in orientation and induction programmes for new staff joining the Office. The United Nations information service in Vienna continues to reissue and disseminate all relevant press releases and public information materials from United Nations Headquarters in its four client countries (Austria, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia), targeting media outlets and "Peace" as well as specialized non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (for example, one organization receives information on Western Sahara only). Usually these releases are placed on NGO websites, so that a redissemination effect is achieved. The commemoration of the International Year of Microcredit in 2005 was used to raise awareness among Governments, finance institutions, NGOs and private investors of the specific opportunities offered through microfinancing for the development and decolonization processes.

14. In its briefings and other activities, the information service in Geneva emphasized that: decolonization is very much a United Nations "success story" and a landmark in human history. The service endeavoured to impress on the public, which is generally unaware, that this achievement stems largely from the Organization's unstinting efforts to bring countries to independence.

15. In its work publicizing decolonization, the information service in Geneva emphasized that: the Trusteeship Council is the only United Nations organ to have completed its work; that from 51 Member States in 1945, the Organization now boasts a membership of 191, thanks in large part to the decolonization process; and that Timor-Leste became the one hundred ninety-first Member State as a result of the United Nations decolonization work. The service also stressed the right of all peoples to self-determination as a fundamental human right.

16. The information service in Geneva also highlighted: the transition of the newly independent territories towards democratic development and peacebuilding in their post-colonial phase; the progress of the Special Committee on Decolonization in bringing the few remaining territories to independence; and matters related to the fulfilment of the second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism (2001-2010).

17. The information service in Geneva also continued, at the Director's biweekly press briefings, to provide new statements relating to decolonization or the right to self-determination made by the Secretary-General, the acting United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, the Special Rapporteurs and Representatives of the Commission on Human Rights, as well as information on specific situations by other United Nations officials. The service also covered important reports of the Security Council, the Special Committee on Decolonization, the Fourth Committee and other bodies. Spokespersons from Geneva-based programmes and agencies also briefed the press on the efforts of their respective organizations to bring immediate humanitarian aid to or to implement long-term nation-building projects in countries in transition.

18. In addition, the information service in Geneva organized press conferences of the acting United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, Special Rapporteurs and Representatives of the Commission on Human Rights and other officials on issues related to decolonization and the right to self-determination.

19. The website of the information service in Geneva posts the press releases of statements made by human rights officials on decolonization; provides meetings coverage on the subject at the annual session of the Commission on Human Rights, its Subcommission and the Geneva-based human rights treaty bodies; and reproduces and reissues press releases received from New York.

20. In both lectures organized for visiting student groups and in guided tours for the public, the information service highlights decolonization issues, including on the presentations of the information service staff and guides on the work of the Trusteeship Council as one of the principal organs of the United Nations.